

# SPORT FISHING

## *Emergency Order*

ALASKA DEPARTMENT  
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 1-SH-B-26-04

Issued at Craig, Tuesday, November 9,  
2004

Effective 12:01 A.M. Monday, November 15, 2004  
Date:

Expiration Date: 11:59 P.M. Friday,  
December 31, 2004, unless superseded by  
subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION: This emergency order closes all fresh waters of Prince of Wales (POW) Island and Kosciusko Island to the harvest of steelhead under sport fishing regulations. Any steelhead caught by sport anglers in the fresh waters of POW Island and Kosciusko Island must be immediately released without removing the fish from the water.

REGULATION: Notwithstanding **5 AAC 47.022. General provisions for seasons and bag, possession, annual and size limits, for the fresh waters of the Southeast Alaska Area** (b) (4), the following provisions are effective:

**5 AAC 47.023 Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the fresh waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.**

(k) In the Prince of Wales Island vicinity:

(8) In all fresh waters of Prince of Wales Island and Kosciusko Island, sport fishing is closed to the harvest of steelhead. In waters closed to the harvest of steelhead any steelhead caught must be immediately released and may not be removed from the water.

Kevin C. Duffy  
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Steven McCurdy  
Prince of Wales Area Management Biologist  
Division of Sport Fish

JUSTIFICATION: Harvest opportunity for steelhead provided by Federal subsistence regulations and permit provisions implemented in 2004 has raised concerns about over harvesting individual fall-run steelhead stocks on Prince of Wales and Kosciusko Islands. Federal subsistence regulations for these areas provide for a winter season December 1 through the last day of February, with a harvest limit of 2 fish per household. Allowable gear includes dip nets, spears, and rod and reel, and the use of bait is prohibited. A permit is required and the winter season may be closed when a harvest cap of 100 steelhead is reached. Federal regulations state that permit conditions and systems to receive special protection will be determined by the local Federal fisheries manager in consultation with ADF&G.

Prior to the implementation of Federal rules, region wide sport fishing regulations provided the only directed harvest opportunity for steelhead (fall and spring stocks) in Southeast Alaska, including POW and Kosciusko Islands. In 1994, the Board of Fisheries substantially restricted that harvest opportunity to conserve steelhead in response to a widespread concern, voiced by residents of Southeast Alaska and sport anglers, that steelhead abundance in Southeast Alaska had declined. The Board reduced harvest limits from five trout (including steelhead) per day, of which only one could be over 16 inches to one steelhead per day, with a minimum size limit of 36 inches and an annual limit of two fish. In addition, use of bait was prohibited for 10 months. Following these actions, annual sport harvests of steelhead in Southeast Alaska declined by 92%.

The majority of the coastal streams on these two islands are small, and are thought to support few fall-run fish. Additionally, information on the status of steelhead on POW and Kosciusko Islands is limited. Stream surveys have been conducted for the Harris River spring run stock and Eagle River spring and fall run stock annually since 1997. These counts provide no indication that steelhead abundance has increased in response to action taken by the Board in 1994.

Harvest assessment programs provide divergent estimates of the number of steelhead harvested for home use. Community household surveys, conducted by Subsistence Division in POW communities in the late 1990's, estimated that 724 steelhead were taken with rod and reel and other non-commercial gear on POW. In contrast, harvest reports required of permittees by Federal regulation tallied 24 steelhead in the spring 2003 fishery and two in the winter 2003-2004 fishery. Preliminary results from a research project conducted in 2004 by Subsistence Division showed that contemporary harvest locations include at least four of the eleven systems known to support fall stocks on these islands, and that the number of steelhead actually harvested is greater than the number reported on Federal permit returns. Annual sport harvests from systems within the POW management area, including POW and Kosciusko Islands, average an estimated 31 steelhead (1995-2003; spring and fall stocks combined).

Harvest opportunity for fall steelhead stocks provided under Federal regulations and permit conditions, when coupled with the existing harvest opportunity provided under sport fishing regulations, puts small individual stocks on POW and Kosciusko Islands at risk to renewed declines in abundance. Given the uncertainty associated with Federal harvest reports and the lack of stock status information, closing these areas to the harvest of steelhead in the sport fishery is necessary to conserve this species while continuing to provide sport fishing opportunity for steelhead.

**DISTRIBUTION:** The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region 1 Office of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, P. O. Box 240020, Douglas, AK 99824, (907) 465-4270; at the Ketchikan Area Office, 2030 Sea Level Drive, Suite 207, Ketchikan, AK 99901, (907) 225-2859; and at the Prince of Wales Island Area Office, P.O. Box 682 Craig, AK 99921, (907) 826-2498.